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ABSTRACT

Research directed toward providing information to be used to improve the social environment of the disadvantaged has been prejudiced by various concerns and power plays in funding agencies. These agencies have a mixture of motives and concerns, efficiency, surveillance, fund allocation, and adherence to national programs. On the other hand, community leaders want a redistribution of resources channeled to their constituents. Information gathering can be used as a delaying tactic to put off making such changes. The values and political philosophy of the researcher usually complement those of the administration and also affect his findings. More objective and thorough methodological approaches are argued for. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.](KG)

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THEORIZING IN A PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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Research directed toward providing information which can be used to improve the social environment of people of poor education and small income is not viewed as impartial truth seeking, either by residents of local neighborhoods or by involved agencies. The funding agency has in its mix of motives concerns over efficiency, surveillance, fund allocation and adherence to national program. Community leaders want redistribution of resources which they can channel to their constituents. Information gathering can be used, like committees, as a delaying tactic to put off making such changes. Despite the sincerity of the research worker he may be a pawn in a larger game of power. In several recent instances research reports have been a most powerful part of the confrontation between groups from different sectors of society who must negotiate a new program of services and distribution of resources. The usefulness of counts of dollars, clients, staffs is obvious. Agreement on such bookkeeping activities has been obtained quickly once the decision is made as to who will be paid for doing the work. The difficulties in reaching agreement about doing research mount rapidly when the value systems of different parties involved in social reform are embodied in the frame of reference for generating questionnaires and interpretations of data.

A current example of this is in the battle for control of the terms of research, the language of the questionnaires and reports continues in the study of the transition of poor youth and black youth from non-work to worker roles. All helping programs have

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some successes and failures in working with youths from deprived backgrounds. Are these, however, to be interpreted as the result of a creaming process (accepting only the best applicants) and failures as the result of lack of proper motivation among the youth or are successes the result of the brightness and deligence of ghetto youth and failures the result of poor training facilities? Or are both successes and failures the result of continually varying entrance criteria for employment in the labor market or the nature of the work situation at entry level jobs with concomitent differences in opportunities for advancement? Directorships of agencies, votes, and federal funding patterns seem to be hinged to the conceptual framework of what is studied.

The psychologist is not exempt from being caught up in partisan loading of questionnaires and interpretations in line with his own social and political philosophy. He may be helped to objectivity, however, by methodological prudence as exemplified by care in sampling. In addition, however, a new process has emerged in social psychological research in a participatory democracy which is worthy of note and analyses. The questions, the questionnaire, and the interviewers have become the object of social negotiation. In several of our recent experiences in "hard core ghettos", in an attempt to facilitate research with groups who have different interests, each of the parties; citizens, agencies, political figures, whose lives (careers) will be influenced is invited to offer interpretation of what the questionnaire etc. means to him. Views among the parties vary widely and not always in anticipated ways. Frequently, discussion will clarify the create

agreement. Sometimes there are differences of opinion which must be negotiated so that all of the parties are convinced that data will be available to be used in support of their position.

These discussions are very enlightening and frequently revealing meanings, relationships with data or higher order abstractions not anticipated by the researcher. They also serve the useful social purpose of clarifying the terms of negotiation between the interested parties.

This process of term definition can be somewhat jarring to the university researcher. It opens the possibility of becoming out of tune with the community of psychologist scholars who have their own tradition as to what words mean and what "processes" must be operating in a given situation.

Two processes seem to provide some checks against a purely politicized view of reality. With determination and good funding luck, it has been possible to provide the first check by studying the psychological processes involved in transition from one style of life to another in several settings. There seem to be a few generalizations which hold for youths entering military training and prisoners leaving jail, as well as the boys in the neighborhood youth corps entering the world of work. Probably the most important message of the psychologists researcher both to political-leader generalization makers and to agency directors concerned with manageable nonfractionated programs is that there are individual differences and differences produced by milieu which have socially serious consequences.

An instance of this emerged in the ghetto studies of transition into the world of work. There were four categories of youth who seem to require differential treatment.

1) Youth who have no plans. They have difficulty in visualizing how participation in the world of work can meet their needs.

2) Youth who have very high aspirations which appear impossible of attainment. This seems to result from a defensive reaction to low self-esteem.

3) Youth lost in the market. These youth lack information and access not motivation.

4) Youth without endurance for the stresses of the market place. They lack the optimism and self-confidence to continue trying in the face of frustration.

With small changes in terminology these types appeared in our prison and army studies. Now these findings do not discredit other factors which may be important in understanding the movement of individuals and groups from one set of a role orientation or psychological identity to another. However, they have some special value in terms of their generalizability and closeness to the data.

Another check against political and administrative definitions of social problems and their solutions as contracted to scientific definitions seems natural to the spychological researcher when he insists on asking the subjects about their experience of the process. In the

case of the series of studies of role transition an interesting regularity has emerged.

Whatever the intelligence and skill of the individual in transition he learns the behavioral and attitudinal elements of a new role piece-meal. It is the anticipation of rewards related to the new role which serves as the incentive for self-change. Maximal reward does not occur for each item of behavior which is learned but rather for performance of the complete role. Inherent then in the transition phase is the fact that newly-learned behaviors lead to less reward than was anticipated. The reaction to this is frustration. This frustration is increased where the new behavior also involves suppressing an old way of doing things. The most general response among youth to this frustration is anger. In the early stages of transition (training) in response to the anger there are frequent reassertions of elements of the former role identity (predictable also on a learning theory basis). At the next stage there is an attack on the presumed sources of the frustration external to the self frequently the trainers and facilities, for being inadequate to really help in the change. Depending on the reception and response to this attack phase by the trainers (apology, acceptance, domination, counter attack) there will either be identification with the supervisor or anxiety. This anxiety seems to result from the youth fear of his own agression. To avoid situations which might precipitate confrontations and anxiety he will begin to avoid criterion situations which will test his achievement. Simultaneously there occurs the downgrading of the incentives which originally motivated him into the program. This sets the stage for the final

step of withdrawal from the program. The crucial factor in the transitional process is the reaction to and by the new reference group for its surrogate the supervisor not only of the skills of the individual but also his frustration and the anger engendered by the process of transition.

Whether these formulations will be verified by later research remains to be seen. However, the process of research itself has come to have new dimensions because of its social implications. The search for concepts and data which are acceptable and meaningful to all parties has taken on the character of negotiation. This in turn requires stricter adherence to methodological structures as well as the inclusion of checks of generalizability through replication and through checking of meaning with subjects.